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Eugene Taylor: An Appreciation

By Simon Senzon, MA, DC

The following is the transcript of a presentation given at *The Second Annual Conference of The Society for Consciousness Studies* at Yale University on June 5, 2015, in Rosenthal Hall at 9:00 AM. The style of the writing is conversational.

By sharing Professor Taylor's impact on me with you in this way, I hope to offer a glimpse of the depth he pointed us to. Rather than just tell you his stories and his theories, I am sharing layers of my own experience both in similar synchronicities from my own personal mythology and also the meaning I make for myself as I go deeper in understanding what he was really teaching. If you can see that I am sharing something beyond the words themselves, then you know what he meant by soteriological writing. The words are used to help you create even more meaning in this moment.

The text of the talk is as follows:

It is an honor to talk about Dr. Eugene Taylor. I only knew Professor Taylor for a short time while I was a student at Saybrook Graduate School for 18 months from 1999 to 2000. It is amazing what an impact he had on my life and work. Reflecting back on my time as a graduate student, I see what an incredible man he was. And today, thanks to this conference and my ability to revisit his life and work over the last few weeks, I have come to appreciate his legacy on a new level of depth.

Synchronous Meetings at Pivotal Moments

I met Eugene at pivotal times in both of our lives, which is interesting because he tells a story about such meetings.

Eugene wrote down a great personal story in his book, *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing*. He was starting out on his journey. His parents did not understand him and so with a backpack on his back he hitched from the northeastern part of the United States to Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas, in a matter of days. At one point he was waiting with no ride for a very long time outside of a town in Pennsylvania, not far from the Ohio border. Two older gentlemen were very curious about him. They picked him up, bought him dinner, gave him a place to sleep, and talked with him well into the night about everything. He wrote, "I was at the beginning of my journey and they were towards the end of theirs." In the morning they gave him a ride over the bridge into Ohio.

Eugene was like one of those guys for me. He took me to a bridge of sorts when I too was at a crossroad. I had just completed my doctorate in chiropractic in South Carolina. I was in between licensure exams, and so I decided to study with Combs at Saybrook in California. While there I took two classes with Eugene.

That is not the first congruence between our lives, at least in how I make meaning of this brief and significant mentor of mine.

I don't bring up this similarity of our crossroad stories or the synchronicity of the

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start of my career and the peak of Eugene's career, lightly. Any appreciation of Eugene Taylor should approach the subject with the depths of the unconscious and make meaning from those depths.

You see, for Eugene, anytime you dip below the margin into the unconscious and glean personal meaning in seemingly random events, you have the potential to use such moments and meetings as points on a personal journey of mythic and transformational proportions. Anyway, I was at the start of my career and he was at the peak of his. I had just published my first peer-reviewed paper, and Taylor had just published four extraordinary books.

In 1996 he published the book, *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin* (Taylor, 1996), and he also edited and published *Pure Experience: The Response to William James* (Taylor & Wozniak, 1996). In 1997 he published a very personal and autobiographical book called *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing* (Taylor, 1997), which he had started in 1968. Then, in 1999 he wrote an amazing work titled *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Taylor, 1999). I read the last two while I was a student. I read *Consciousness Beyond the Margin* just a couple of weeks ago in preparation for this talk.

Consciousness Beyond the Margin is a wonderful book. It gives a full account of Eugene's contribution to the world in regard to his William James scholarship. His discovery of William James' personal library, which was literally scattered throughout millions of texts in the library at Harvard, prepared him for his incredible reconstruction of James' 1896

Lowell Lectures on *States of Consciousness*. Here we discover Eugene's deep appreciation of James' true contribution to psychology, well beyond his classic text from 1890. Interestingly, James was a pioneer of the human unconscious as well, even before Freud. James actually introduced Freud to America in an article (Taylor, 1996).

Without going through the main arguments in the text, which I highly recommend, there were two things that really jumped out at me in this book. The first was Eugene's insight about psychology as epistemology. For him, this should become a major perspective for the future. Mainly what he meant by this, was that psychology should inform all of the sciences and everyday experience should be infused with psychological depth. Such an epistemology would emphasize the Jamesian insights into states as access to the unconscious. It would also include a Swedenborgian leaning, whereas the Spiritual always corresponds to the physical.

The second thing that jumped out, was his method. I was amazed to read the following,

And while my method has been most heavily informed by the University of Chicago tradition of textual analysis in comparative religions, it has been further modified in its adaptation to the historical literature of psychology and psychiatry by the influence on my own thinking of Buddhist epistemology and James's radical empiricism. In this adaptation the method is exegetical; that is, it is freely applied to contemporary circumstances wherever possible. It also serves a soteriologic function—namely, it presumes that historical scholarship has applications

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to the process of personality transformation where questions about the nature of ultimate reality are concerned. (Taylor, 1996) (p. xi)

The thing that really got my attention from this paragraph was the last line. By soteriologic function, Taylor means that the writing of history, “where questions about the nature of ultimate reality are concerned,” can lead the reader to a type of salvation or enlightenment. When I read this I realized that Eugene and I were either more alike than I realized, or that he influenced me and my writing more than I have previously recognized. I even shared this passage with my wife, and she said, “Isn’t that what you do?” Incidentally, I am also a trained historian with a Buddhist perspective that spans three decades. I have always been inspired by authors who write like this such as Combs (2003), Gebser (1949), and Wilber (1995), with his psychoactive AQAL model, but this was the first time it was explained as an intentional soteriologic method. Amazing!

As I noted above, I had just published my first peer-reviewed paper when I started studying with Eugene. The paper was titled, *Causation related to self-organization, and health related quality of life expression: Based on the vertebral subluxation model, the philosophy of chiropractic, and the new biology* (Senzon, 1999). I realize it was a gigantic title, but it did capture the ambitiousness of the article. The paper itself documented the roots of the philosophy of chiropractic in 20th century theoretical biology by using Wilber’s (1995) four quadrant perspective. In the paper I

proposed the “health continuum model,” which starts on one end of the continuum with the self-organizational and autopoietic processes as the fundamental health expression of an inherently intelligent organism and extends to the higher reaches of wellness, or what I termed biopsychosocialspiritual health.

Eugene’s perspective rooted me to my own traditions and historical depth. He helped me to understand the roots in chiropractic’s philosophical base, which arose in part from the American shadow culture. Eugene was one of the world experts on this uniquely American strand of culture.

My own insight into the layers and impact of Eugene’s work does not end there. His unique perspective on unconscious depth took many turns, some of which paralleled my own life experiences. Add to this his unique explanation of synchronicity, and meaning and a tapestry of a psychological and spiritual reality unfolds as the heart of his vision. This was his contribution to the visionary tradition.

Guardian Angels and Personal Iconography

To Eugene, helpers on one’s path that just show up at the right place and at the right time are actually angels. This was yet another tool of his to draw depth from life’s daily events, and also another great connection for me in his work.

There is a story he told about driving with a friend from Utah to Arizona through Colorado. At one point, early in the morning, he got the inspiration to stop at a spring and fill up some water jugs. When they got into Colorado and looked at a map on a placemat at a diner, they spotted a route that would save

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hours of driving. They did not realize this would be a dirt road over the mountain pass. They got stuck at the top in a cloud. Lo and behold, a runner with his dog jogged by out of the cloud, told them to pour water on the gas line, and ran on. Sure enough it worked. This was another angel to Eugene, as were the two men in Pennsylvania (Horrigan, 1998).

Interestingly, I had almost the exact same experience. After completing my graduate studies, I drove from California where I was living, to South Carolina and started chiropractic college. I too got stuck at the top of a mountain in the desert, only I was in Southern California with all of my belongings and my dog. I was already using the journey through the desert as type of meditation and so, in a state of ecstatic wonder, imagining angels gathered on my roof, I went for a walk with the dog fully expecting that all would be fine. When we heard a car pull up a few moments later, my dog Paschia and I watched as two or three Spanish speaking men poured water on their gas line. I popped my hood and did the same. It did not work. My problems were bigger. It turned out, without any common language between us and some prompting from these Mexican angels, I was able to locate some speaker wire from my stereo, which was packed in the trunk. One of the men hooked the wire from my car battery to my engine's fan. It worked like that for several years. I had to pop the hood and power up the fan before each drive in the summer. The men were very happy to see me throw up my arms and look to the sky in thanks.

So for me, the significance of these experiences went beyond words. I read Eugene's story and saw myself, my own

journey. This deepened the meaning and significance for me. For Eugene, these events and these types of connections are part of one's personal mythological journey in the context of the psychology of the moment.

In his book, *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing*, Eugene mapped out what he considered a dynamic psychology of the present moment. Events that were significant to you, keys to the core of who you are, act as maps to your own personal development. Such a map is a way to navigate the unconscious, and a bridge to states of consciousness.

His vision of the dynamic psychology of immediate experience is rooted in the classic idea of personality development, personal transformation, and a mythic insight into one's own hero journey. Significant events are imbued with meaning and depth because of the personal import.

One way to emphasize this element of personal destiny as a way of being, is what Professor Taylor called, *The Iconography of the Transcendent*. This is truly a methodology to keep oneself rooted in such experiences, so that you might utilize them throughout the lifespan to continually develop. For example, when Eugene was a child around age six, he called to his parents for "one more glass of water." When his parents refused to come he decided to make himself cry, except he found this task difficult. And so, he focused all of his attention on Jesus, on the cross, as an image that might bring tears. He soon found himself silently and deeply weeping, and the room filled with an ethereal glow. Years later he found a large cross from a church in a second-hand shop. He purchased the cross and kept it in order to connect his consciousness to this

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early experience. The iconography of the cross pointed him to his own transcendent moment in the past, and ideally acted as a conduit for similar states in the future.

Synchronicity

Taylor's Jamesian psychology of spiritual healing is most prescient in his approach to synchronicity. When seemingly coincidental events occur it is the meaning that you apply to them, which determines whether it is synchronicity or coincidence. Your interpretation, according to Taylor, is based on contact with your own unconscious depths, and not what others opine about the event. He noted that Jung referred to this as *synchronicity*, James referred to it as *Tychism* (based on Pierce), and Swedenborg referred to it as *Divine Providence*. Eugene combined all of these (Horrigan, 1998; Taylor, 1997).

I recently wrote about synchronicity in the context of Wilber's integral approach to subtle energies. Wilber and DeVos suggested it was when all four quadrants come together, as if Agape is pulling you up to your own next level, in all quadrants, while Eros pushes (Wilber & DeVos, 2007). This blending of interior and exterior is the essence of the experience. For me, it is about as close as I get to true religion.

(Incidentally, B.J. Palmer [son of the first chiropractor] referred to this as "that something" – when you were so in tune with the innate intelligence within, that it connects you through the universal intelligence to coincidences that happen so regularly you must eventually accept such events as law (Palmer, 1949).

After studying yoga and Sanskrit for eight years, one of Eugene's friends challenged him to locate the cover of the national geographic for the day he was born. It was a special issue on Pakistan, which was then part of British controlled India. For Eugene, this was another link in a deep chain of personal destiny, synchronicity, and meaning (Taylor, 1997).

The Shadow Culture as My Inspiration

One of the more synchronous events to occur in my connection with Eugene Taylor as mentor or angel, happened during one of his lectures while at my first Saybrook residency. He lectured on the *Shadow Culture*, and during the lecture he had a slide of D. D. Palmer adjusting Shegatoro Morikubo. Palmer was the first chiropractor, and Morikubo's landmark court case was a turning point for the legal, social, and philosophical dimensions of chiropractic as a profession. In recent years, I have become one of the leading experts on both. I don't think Eugene knew that I was coming to the lecture when he included this particular slide, and I did not realize the deep roots humanistic psychology shared with chiropractic.

The Shadow Culture goes beyond a personal iconography of the transcendent; it offers an iconography for our entire culture. The book challenged me to contextualize all of my studies from my undergraduate research in the history of ideas and American religion, to my graduate studies in philosophy and transpersonal psychology, to my more recent chiropractic lineage. Situating my work in an explicit historical context with academic rigor became a passion of mine.

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D. D. Palmer was a magnetic healer for nine-years before inventing chiropractic. He was a self-taught anatomist and physiologist, was very well-read, and was also a Spiritualist. A collection of his personal library includes at least thirteen books on Mesmerism, magnetic healing, Spiritualism, and other natural philosophical approaches to life, health, and mind. Taylor placed D. D. Palmer, within the American visionary tradition alongside other luminaries such as Quimby, James, and A.T. Still (Taylor, 1999). Other historians have done so as well (Albanese, 2007; Fuller, 1989), at least one going so far as to compare Palmer to contemporaries such as James, Bergson, Merle-Ponty, and Freud (Gaucher, 1993).

Spiritualism in the 19th century American cultural milieu was really a combination of Swedenborgianism and Mesmerism. Swedenborg was an Enlightenment era scientist who sought his own interior depths later in life in his sixties. His phenomenological experiments led to many visionary states, where angels walked him through heaven. He wrote books describing how to access such states and what heaven is like. Taylor was an expert on Swedenborg, in part because the James family were followers of Swedenborg. According to *Shadow Culture*, Swedenborg's teachings had a very big impact on America, and was promulgated by most of the homeopaths in the 19th century (Taylor, 1999).

Spiritualism was an eclectic conglomeration of beliefs. Basically, the pragmatic Americans embraced Swedenborg's view of heaven and access to altered states, and explained them with Mesmer's ether. The energetic ether

became the "physical" bridge, linking humans to heaven and the afterlife. This approach was especially embraced after the Civil War and 100,000 dead on American soil. D. D. Palmer became a Spiritualist in the 1860s, and a magnetic healer in the 1880s. His first chiropractic adjustment was bestowed upon Harvey Lillard in 1895. Lillard was a deaf janitor whose hearing was restored. During this time, James was actively investigating psychic phenomena in his lab at Harvard. He delivered the *Lowell Lectures* in 1896. Eugene not only reconstructed these lectures from notes in James' massive collection of Spiritualist books, but delivered the lectures to the Swedenborg Society in 1978 as well (Ghaemi, 2013).

An Aside:

As one of the deeper meanings for me in learning more about Eugene, it feels significant that I am currently reconstructing D. D. Palmer's first book based on his letters and early published writings on chiropractic. The layers of depth viewed from the first person perspective are what matter to one's personal iconography of the transcendent.

In recent weeks, I was inspired by Eugene's analysis of the books James was reading, and so I went even further in my own pursuit of D. D. Palmer's library. (In 2007, I published a collection of the books Palmer was reading along with several chapters that used *Shadow Culture* as a jumping off point (Senzon, 2007)). I was able to determine that one of D.D. Palmer's favorite authors, Babbitt, a magnetic healer, was a student of W.F. Evans, who was healed by Quimby. Both Edwards and Quimby were prominent developers of many of the tenets of the New Thought movement (Taylor,

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1999). The linkages and connections continue to inform my work, fascinate my mind, and inspire spirit.

The Shadow Culture's Amazing Tales

Taylor's deeper look into what he called American Folk Psychology and the American Visionary Tradition, reaches far into the American soul. There are elements to the history that have bypassed most historians. I recall my undergraduate course in American religion in 1991 quite fondly. I even did a term paper on a history of the New Age movement. Few of the stories that Taylor shares were available to my novice historical research, or published in the textbooks on American religiosity.

For example, he included a wonderful discussion of Beiser, a European mystic who found solace on American soil. He longed to live alone in a cave on the banks of a river in undeveloped Pennsylvania, home to many eclectic spiritual communities. In the 1740s, he acquired a following. They formed the cloistered community of Ephrata. Ephrata pilgrims would act as missionaries, and walk silently through the towns of the colonies cloaked in long woolen hooded robes, barefooted, and with long staffs. Their distant relatives today are the Mennonites and Amish.

Another fascinating tale, was about the early days of Esalen, and more specifically, the birth of the Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology movements. I recall that during the research for my paper in 1991 on the New Age movement, Esalen was written about in many books as a sort of holy city on a hill. It was exciting for me to learn of the historical

roots and actual stories. I was also in awe that Eugene knew many of the players.

My favorite story was from the pivotal moment when the Humanistic movement was morphing into the Transpersonal movement. It is an extended quote but well worth retelling. Taylor writes,

"During a seminar on the new language needed for such a transformative psychology... The group that gathered for an intellectual brainstorming session included a small number of invited participants, including Maslow, Sutich, and a man named Hobart Thomas, who was sitting next to Sutich when the session began. Suddenly, however, there was an invasion of about a dozen people who appeared to be part of the Esalen residential program, one of whom was Fritz Perls."

"As the discussion began, Perls threw the session into complete disorganization by getting down on the floor. Spread out on all fours, he started slowly slithering across the room toward Thomas. As Perls passed by his chair, Sutich could hear him muttering over and over, "You are my daddy. I am coming to you." Eventually, Perls got to Thomas's chair and wrapped his arms around the man's legs, all the while continuing to mutter over and over this same chant. Thomas appeared quite embarrassed and at first could not shake off Perls. He finally succeeded, but by then complete chaos had developed. As groups at Esalen are traditionally

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leaderless, except when someone chooses to exert themselves, no one was in charge during this episode; no one took over the reins of command. Nevertheless, everyone was shocked, angry, and outraged.”

Soon after this event Maslow and Sutich left the Association for Humanistic Psychology, which they had started, and formed the International Association for Transpersonal Psychology.

Because of Eugene’s presence, writings, and his courses, even though I was a student at Saybrook for only eighteen months, I felt as though I was part of a vast historical movement more so than ever before. After all, I was now not only steeped in the chiropractic history, a graduate from one of the only schools in Palmer’s philosophical lineage, a serious student of Wilber’s work, but also studying at the leading school in Humanistic Psychology. It felt as though (as my life often did when my studies were congruent with the rhythm of my life’s trajectory) I was in the right place at the right time, and going deeper into what life was really about, meaning and consciousness, depth, and ancient historical connections.

Reconstructing The Secret History of Chiropractic

One of my most closely held and significant compliments I have yet received on my own scholastic work, was when Eugene suggested that one of my papers for his course was “brilliant.” There was something so special about receiving a complement like that from this man, with his stature, and his bearing, that I still hold it dear. I believe the paper was

either on Varela’s Enactive paradigm, or on the book *Zen and the Brain* (Austin, 1999). It was the gift of the complement that had value and meaning, not the content of my own work that mattered so much.

I wrote two papers for my coursework in Professor Taylor’s classes that were published. The first was, *An integral approach to unifying the philosophy of chiropractic: B.J. Palmer’s model of consciousness* (Senzon, 2000). It was published by Combs in his *Journal of Conscious Evolution*. The paper was written for a course called *Models of Consciousness*, and was republished by a chiropractic journal soon after. The other paper was published in the journal, *Chiropractic History*, and won the award for best paper at the Association for Chiropractic History conference in 2001 (Senzon, 2001).

I have since continued my writing and research on the history and philosophy of chiropractic in significant ways. My initial goal enrolling at Saybrook was to complete a dissertation on B. J. Palmer’s spiritual writings. Rather than complete my doctoral studies at Saybrook, I ventured out as an independent scholar practitioner, and taught at various colleges part-time along the way. Since that time, I have published several books on the writings of both Palmers (Senzon, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010d), initiated a book series of lost classics from the philosophy of chiropractic, and published at least ten more papers in the literature (Epstein, Senzon, & Lemberger, 2009; Senzon, 2003; Senzon, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d; Senzon, 2014; Senzon, Epstein, & Lemberger, 2011).

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My current work involves reconstructing the history of the philosophy of chiropractic with an emphasis on the 20th century writings, as well as the roots in the American Visionary Tradition, and even earlier roots in Western philosophy. I use Wilber's AQAL model as a lens. One of the latest papers (currently in review), utilizes Integral Epistemological Pluralism, or IEP (which is very similar to Eugene's uses of psychology as epistemology – only his emphasis was more on states, IEP includes states and structures or levels of consciousness).

My plan for the future is to bring this work forward in a series of accessible online courses for the chiropractic profession, with dialogues between myself and the leaders of other fields like consciousness studies, subtle energies, psychology, and philosophy. Perhaps after that, I can extend these ideas to other disciplines as there are many shared roots in the American Visionary Tradition.

In this small way, I see Dr. Taylor's work being brought forward into the world and in a more significant way, helping to transform a profession, individuals associated with that profession, and eventually a more transdisciplinary embrace with a soteriologic function at the heart of my writings and courses. I am thankful, and very grateful, for the way he touched my life and my work, and the way he quietly helped to transform the world.

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